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ABSTRACT

Intended to encourage Alaska teachers to write, to provide an honest sounding board for those submitting work, and to be a pleasure to read, this booklet presents a collection of 20 pieces of writing (short stories, poems, and life experiences) by Alaskan teachers. The pieces and their authors are as follows: "The First Haiku" (Dan Walker); "Baptism of the Bush" (Bambi Hill); "A Small Soft Sound" (R. D. Levno); "Fishing" (Dan Walker); "Middle Rip, Cook should encourage Alaskan teachers to write, it should provide an honest sounding board for those submitting work, and it should be a pleasure to read. The 20 pieces of writing contained in the booklet (short stories, poems, and life experiences) all by Alaskan teachers, are as follows: "The First Haiku" (Dan (Patrick S. Dixon); "Memories of the FV Beaver" (David Jaynes); "The Ghosts of Woodbury Hall" (Barbara Christian); "Gleanings" (Bambi Hill); "A Moment of Delight" (Douglas R. Capra); "Old Woman" (Frank Keim); "Mist Memories" (Sandra Fuller); "Just Like Home" (Patrick A. Stevens); "Outhouse with Unique Charm" (Ruth Bradford); "The Great Wheel" (Frank Keim); "Changes2" (Dennis Lenssen); "Logging Museum" (Sandra Fuller); "Famine" (Evelyn Willburn); ""Heaven" (Evelyn Willburn); "The Juneau Portfolio Process: A New Paradigm" (Mary Tonkovich and others); and "Kodiak Winter Rains" (David Jaynes). (SR)

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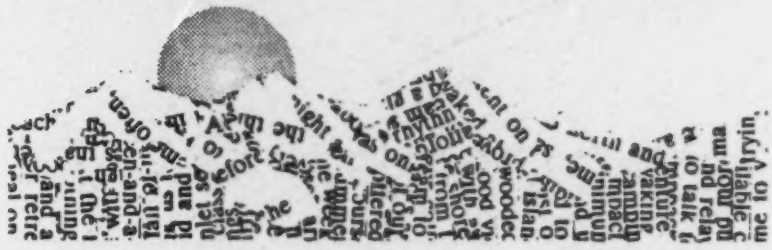

A Journal of Writing by Alaskan Teachers

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A publication of the Alaska State Writing Consortium

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Shaping the Landscape

A Journal of Writing by Alaskan Teachers 1992

A publication of the Alaska State Writing Consortium

The Alaska State Writing Consortium is an association of school districts, the Alaska State Department of Education, and the University of Alaska, all working to improve student achievement in writing.

Introduction

Each year, as I begin receiving and reading the short stories, poems and life experiences of Alaska's teachers-as-writers, I marvel. I marvel at the range and depth of experience these writers show as they tell of their own particular corner of Alaska, or of some inner landscape all their own. I marvel at the tremendous talent shown by some of the writers, and the willingness to share their visions shown by all who send in their work. And, as a mother of preschool children, I am thankful that these writers, from throughout Alaska, are working to become better writers, and hence better teachers of writing.

The importance of writing well cannot be underestimated, as teachers are well aware. No one can afford to be without the ability to write clearly and simply, no matter what his or her life's endeavor.

It is the belief of the Alaska State Writing Consortium, which is supported by the Department of Education, that the best way to teach writing is to write. By publishing *Shaping the Landscape*, which the ASWC has done now for five years, the ASWC hopes that a journal that critically reviews the writings of teachers, and publishes the best of that writing, will encourage such writing.

The key to this journal is that critical review process. This year, we received 70 submissions from 36 authors. Of those, we chose 20 for publication.

Those writers whose work wasn't accepted, as well as those whose work was chosen, should realize that our journal's editors have been setting their standards a little higher each year. We do that in the belief that our writers have been doing the same. It's certainly true that the overall quality of writing we received this year, compared to the first year we sought submissions is vastly improved.

I have been extremely fortunate to have an outstanding board of Alaska writers and editors willing to give their time to this publication. These editors, as you can see by looking at their short biographies following, come to this project with a formidable background in writing, editing and teaching. I give them my warmest thanks--thanks which should also be extended to ASWC Coordinator Judith Entwife and her associate, Rosemary Hagevig. Another heartfelt thanks must go to our artists, Susan Remick and Hilarie Samuels Meadows, and proofreaders Judith Entwife, Karen Mitchell and David Jaynes.

"Shaping the Landscape" has many roles to fill; it should encourage Alaska teachers to write, it should provide an honest and critical sounding board for those submitting work, and it should be a pleasure to read. I believe that this year it succeeds on all counts.

In closing, I want to congratulate everyone who took the courageous step of sharing the intimate act of their writing with us. Whether your work is on these pages or not isn't nearly as important as your continuing to write.

Betsy Longenbaugh
Managing Editor
Shaping the Landscape 1992

Shaping the Landscape Editors

Jack Campbell *teaches English at Lathrop High School in Fairbanks. He has edited* The Great Alaska Play Rush, *ACTE's* Writings From Alaska's Schools, the University of Alaska's Rural Alaska Honors Institute Yearbook, *and Southeast Island School District's* Out of the Woods. *He has also been an editor of* Shaping the Landscape. *He is a former board member of the Alaska State Writing Consortium and co-directed the Alaska Teacher Research Network. His work appeared last year in* Notes From the Blueberry Bog, Wheelwatch Companion II, Shaping the Landscape, *and* The Far Vision, the Close Look.

Bill Chalmers *"recognizes writing at Juneau Douglas High School," he writes. This is the first time he has acted as an editor for* Shaping the Landscape. *He adds that he's "still not sure he believes in jurying another's writing."*

Lori Evans *is managing editor of* The Peninsula Clarion *newspaper in Kenai. She is a former editor at the* Juneau Empire *and has many years experience as a reporter and writer.*

Nancy Ferrell *divides her time between freelance writing and working for the public library in Juneau. She is the author of several non-fiction children's books and has written for more than fifteen years. Ms. Ferrell wrote and edited the Bureau of Labor Statistics newsletter in Juneau, and wrote flyers and brochures for Brigham Young University. She has also written articles and stories. Ferrell taught kindergarten through eighth grade in Sitka and Juneau and has taught in jails, for community groups, and for the University of Alaska. This is the fifth year that Ms. Ferrell has been an editor for* Shaping the Landscape.

David Jaynes *currently teaches at Kodiak College. He has been active in the ASWC since its inception, as a teacher leader and presenter. His poetry has appeared in variou small press publications, including past* Shaping the Landscape *journals. His work is also published in this year's* Shaping the Landscape.

Betsy Longenbaugh, *who was managing editor for* Shaping the Landscape 1992, *has a writing and editing business in Douglas, where she began working in her home after the birth of her first child four years ago. Her background includes six and a half years as a newspaper reporter and editor in Sitka and Juneau. She is currently writer and editor of a monthly newsletter on health issues for the Alaska State Hospital & Nursing Home Association, edits a newsletter for the Migrant Education and Chapter 1 programs for the Department of Education, and writes press releases and other material for the Alaska State Museum. She received her journalism degree from the University of Oregon. She has been managing editor for* Shaping the Landscape *since 1989.*

Mike McCormick *has taught public school in Anchorage and Juneau in grades kindergarten through eight and has been a reviewer and columnist for the* Anchorage Daily News. *His poems and feature articles have appeared in numerous publications in Alaska, the Lower Forty-Eight and Canada. He's authored two collections of poetry:* Infact Poems *(Birchbark Press, Eagle River, 1989) and* Blues Before Sunset *(Devil's Club Press, Juneau 1989) and published a collection of Gary Holthaus,* Eight Days in Autumn *(Birthbark Books, 1990). He currently lives in Eagle River and teaches language arts and reading at Muldoon School in Anchorage. He is also working on a manuscript of essays about making a place a home.*

Kenneth Melville *is a poet and visual artist in Juneau. He has been a technical writer for the Graphic Arts Research Center at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Melville was also editor for the literary magazines* The Collector *and* Devil's Club Press, *privately distributed editions of works by Alaska poets.*

Bruce Scandling *is assistant editor for the daily newspaper, the* Juneau Empire. *His background includes ten years of writing and editing experience for the* Juneau Empire, *Associated Press, KTOO-FM in Juneau and the* Valley Times *in Beaverton, Ore., as well as a stint as a special assistant to Gov. Steve Cowper.*

Virginia Sims *lives in Sitka, where she retired after forty years experience as a writer and editor. During that time, she worked for the Associated Press in Seattle and Juneau, was associate editor for* Alaska Sportsman, *an associate editor for Scholastic Magazines in New York, editor for* Junior Scholastic, *editor for* Senior Scholastic, *and editor and writer for* Alaska Tidelines/Earthlines, *a publication of the Alaska Sea Grant Program and Alaska Geographic. She has been an editor of* Shaping the Landscape *since 1989.*

Joey Wauters *chairs the English department of the University of Alaska Southeast, where she has taught courses in literature and composition since 1977. She received her doctor of arts in English from the University of Michigan in 1980 and has since published articles in education journals on research and pedagogy in English. Her students, who have won numerous statewide and national prizes for their essays, are represented in an anthology of best college student writers published by Bedford Books. Wauters has organized a critique group for faculty creative writers at UAS, and one of her short stories was awarded first place in* Redbook *magazine's Short Story Contest in 1990. She was an editor of the first edition of* Shaping the Landscape.

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The First Haiku

Miyaga, the poet, sat on a smooth stone in his garden gnawing the end of his pen as he studied the words on the rice paper before him. Every few minutes he would lean back and let his eyes float up among the clouds tangled about the mountain tops. He had been there every day for a week, sitting beneath the same tree.

Climb the wind, small bird
and tell me what you see there.
My ladder is short.

Sota, the fisherman, saw Miyaga when he toted his tools to the beach where he was building a boat. Kito, the stone mason, noticed Miyaga each morning as he pushed by his cart full of stones. Even the snails and sparrows seemed to wonder about the man who spent his day hunched over his papers among the bamboo and fish pond of his garden.

"Miyaga!" Sota called one afternoon as he passed, "Let us have tea."

"I'm sorry," Miyaga replied, "I have work to do here that I want to finish. Soon though, I promise." Sota went away scratching his head.

The next day, Kito passed by and playfully tossed a pebble at his friend on the stone beneath the shadow of the trees. "Come, Miyaga, let's go to the cove and gather crawfish and mussels for a fine chowder. It's a grand day for it."

"My dear Kito," Miyaga answered without looking up from his writing. "I'm so busy working on something I want to finish. But soon I will finish and we can go to the beach." The stone mason lumbered off with his cart, shaking his head and muttering under his breath.

From the gray mountain
stones tumble to the valley.
They make a farmer's wall.

Miyaga was up early the next morning and, after quickly washing, was back at his place in the garden to spend his days divided between clouds and paper. His cat wandered off to find a friendlier house and his sister quit bringing noodles that he didn't eat, so all was quiet in the garden. Even the nervous mice had learned to ignore Miyaga at his work.

The poet would labor for hours. Then he walked through the garden gazing at the sky from different angles. Some days he wrote hardly a word and others he spent scrawling on sheet after sheet of rice paper, only to throw them all in the brazier that burned softly in his sitting room. Lying on his back one afternoon studying the flocks of fleecy clouds, he let a rainstorm sweep in and drench him. Ignoring the cold droplets and the puddles forming around his shoulders, he lay as if dead on the clay path.

The tossed pebble
makes the sparrow leave its nest.
Bamboo doesn't flee.

One day as the sun was going down and the farmers were leaving their fields, Kito trudged home with his cart filled with shovels, buckets, and trowels. He softly whistled a song and coins jingled in his pockets.

At the path from the beach he met his friend Sota with his box of tools and a string of bright fresh fish. "Your day has been good, my friend?" Kito asked, looking at the fisherman's burden.

"Oh, yes," chattered Sota, "and did I not hear silver jingling in your pockets?"

"Indeed you did. But come, we must see to Miyaga. He has been locked in that garden long enough!"

No sooner had Kito spoken than down the evening path ran Miyaga, stopping in front of his neglected friends, puffing and beaming. His hair was a tangle and his jacket ink splattered and rumpled. But his face was a bright fire of excitement. Grabbing a great breath of air, he began, "My friends, such fortune to find you here.

At last my job is done. Come let us have tea and I will share with you the product of my labor."

Miyaga soon had his friends settled on the soft cushions, sipping tea in his tiny house. Rising to his knees, he spoke. "Now it is finished. After many days and nights of hard work and diligence it is complete. Listen!" Unrolling a small paper he clutched in his hand, he read:

"The clouds tumble loose
and dance, footless, on the sky.
The wind sweeps them home."

Miyaga looked up from his reading to the faces of his companions. They looked back with questions on their lips. "Well?" asked the writer.

"Well what?" Sota answered. "Is that all?"

"Yes."

"You spent these days on that...what, twelve...fifteen words?" Sota's laughter broke over his words. "Two weeks. Ha ha! Three lines! Oh, please, in two weeks I gathered lumber and built a boat. I went fishing and caught fat silver fish, and you..." he sputtered with laughter, "you show me this?"

"And I," inserted Kito, "I have gathered stone and built a wall for which I was paid a fine price, in silver." He too was laughing now. "I really must go. Two weeks and this is what you show us ... oh, Miyaga, what shall we do with you?"

"Please," he said, "Let me read another."

He opened another parchment and read:

"The tide erases
the tracks of the sandpiper
along with his bones."

As his guests laughed and chided, Miyaga spoke no words. He clutched the rolled paper and stared at the rug on the floor. His hand tightened around the paper, crumpling it and turning his knuckles white. When they left he lay down and wept into the coarse rug, cradling the fragile parchment to his chest.

The next morning, Miyaga awoke to the busy sound of morning birds and the golden blanket of sunlight across his back. He smoothed the paper still in his hand and, rolling it tightly, tied it with a bit of string and lay it in a basket near the tea table where other rolled papers rested.

"I really thought I had it that time," he mused. "I thought for sure they'd approve of that one."

Suddenly hungry, Miyaga went off to find a bath and breakfast before he went back to work. An idea was already shaping in his head by the time he finished his rice cakes and cold fish, so he went out to buy a new pen.

It was many days before Miyaga saw his friends again and many weeks before he invited them for tea. He never read them words from the rolls of rice paper, though he continued to write every day.

Like a sea otter,
the ocean lies on its back,
urchin boats on its chest.

The three men grew old and one day Sota stopped going down to the ocean to catch fish, and only seldom did Kito follow his sons along the road to where they were building a stone bridge. The fisherman's boat lost its strength and began to sag and leak until it was left on the beach to rot. Kito's stone wall was covered, first with moss and then weeds and vines until it could no longer be seen from the path.

One day when the cold winds of winter brought the rain and old bones felt stiff and sore, two old men shuffled into the garden of Miyaga's house.

"Miyaga! Have you a cup of hot tea for two worthless old dogs?" demanded Kito.

"There are fresh coals in the brazier and the kettle is steaming. Come in, old friends." Miyaga settled his visitors on soft cushions and gave them worn but warm slippers to wear. They sipped hot tea.

Sota gestured with a gnarled hand at the rolls of rice paper neatly stacked in baskets along the wall. "You

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are still writing, old man?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Would you read to us? Poetry is good for cold winter days."

"Yes," Kito agreed. "That would be good."

Miyaga smiled and quietly rose from his seat and sorted through a basket of parchments, yellow with age. He selected one and began to read:

"The clouds tumble loose
and dance, footless, on the sky.
The wind sweeps them home."

The tiny house was silent except for the sound of wind driving the rain against the tile roof. The old men sipped their tea. Finally Kito spoke, "Magnificent. I have seen the clouds for seventy years but now I see them anew."

"Indeed," agreed his companion. "You have captured true beauty with your pen. Let us hear more."

Miyaga eagerly unrolled more parchments and refilled the tea kettle. Far into the night the friends listened to haiku and talked of their life together. And many more days and nights in the winter of their years the three friends shared pots of tea and unrolled pieces of rice paper tied with bits of string.

--Dan Walker

Dan Walker was raised on the Kenai Peninsula, has lived in Alaska most of his life and has taught in Seward for nine years. He has taught fourth and sixth grades, junior high and taught a class for the gifted for five years. Dan's writing career began in high school as sports editor for the school paper. "Not until I was the big thirty-five did I begin writing diligently," he writes. He has had work published in Alaska Magazine; *the* Alaska Journal; *the* Western Horse; Pacific Fishing; Mountain Passages, *a New Mexico literary magazine;* WheelWatch Companion II, *an annual literary anthology of Kodiak College; and* North Word, the newsletter of the Alaska State Writing Consortium. "Stories come from tales told around kitchen tables or snapshots stored in the shoeboxes of the writer's mind. No story is completely fiction, just as the truth is rarely pure fact."

Baptism of the Bush

Early mornings at my rural school,
the shower, soothing, endless, hot, consoles me.
A rare comfort.
I survey my existence without interruption,
wash away three days' leavings,
weigh my life choices,
Find them surprisingly balanced.

Freed of tension, alone, singing,
I walk bare between sink and bench,
My body, unencumbered,
Strong, though sagging, wrinkled.

Once, as I undressed to shower,
The generator failed.
I stood in the dark, about to cry,
Struck by the necessity of this quiet time of cleansing.

I took out my flashlight,
Sat half naked, praying.
Prayed for power,
Prayed for water,
Prayed for strength.

--Bambi Hill

Bambi Hill lives and teaches in the "now-famous Sleetmute on the Kuskokwim." This is her sixth year in this position. She has written since she was a child and never submitted anything for publication until last year, when she had two pieces accepted for Shaping the Landscape. *She writes, "It's exciting to be published!"*

A Small Soft Sound

A small, soft idea slips into my mind, dampening it,
Like ice in the cracks of wood, permeates, grows,
Splits it open.

A soft entry into the day, from
A full night, the drums singing from moon to moon to moon.
The melting circle of seven or forty-nine.

Later the sweet, self-absorbed noises of finding ways,
Many of us naming desires, and compassion, underlaid with a
Steady heartbeat. Good women working. I hear them.

In my wood nest in the grasses by the Bering Sea,
Listening in the starlight, moonrise, noonday,
Mists floating over ponds at sunrise, waiting, vibrating
Until awash with the flood of ourselves coming together again.
Then the tide recedes into the ocean again, gently.

I walk outside in the damp, green morning, my eyes full
Of reflections, village houses red and green, hanging over ponds
And doubled in their stillness.

I step carefully on the slippery, gray planks of the boardwalks
That wind from house to house, on mud and over bridges.
Still connected, still singing with you...with all of us.

I drum the heartbeat at the beginning every time.
Then the steady faster beat takes over, wobbles, thuds,
Finds itself, becomes strong and constant, becomes forgetful,
Wakes up, reaches deeper, begins throaty singing, making something--
And suddenly finished.

The sound slips into the world, growing, like ice splitting the wood,
Bursts like a bud, into flower.

--R.D. Levno

R.D. Levno is a teacher in the village school in Tuntutuliak. Her first piece was published when she was a young child--a rhymed poem about geraniums appeared in the Instructor *magazine after it was sent to the magazine by her teacher. "I didn't begin writing poetry again until last year," she writes, "but I taught writing (if that isn't an oxymoron) to many children in the meantime." Some of her students won state poetry contests, many of them saw their poems in print, but all her classes have been rich in poetry. "Some of the most beautiful poems I ever read I have found crumpled on the floor at the end of the day; and there's always more where that came from. As for me, I have boxes of notes and draft manuscripts about schools and teaching, about my life and other women's lives. Now I have a small pile of poems, too."*

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Fishing

The sun was high, but the campground was still quiet and the air still tasted of dew, so the old man knew it was early. His boy was up making coffee and filling the skillet with bacon, letting him lie in bed for a few minutes while the coffee pot began its burping and chugging and bacon sizzled. He liked the smell but wished they were camping outside, where coffee and bacon smelled better.

"No eggs for me," he said, and shook a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket. "Just some bacon and toast will be good."

"No coffee?"

"Aren't you a smartass this morning. No coffee, ha! I wouldn't be able to walk." One of these mornings he wouldn't be able to walk anyway. He leaned on one elbow and squinted through the smoke at the lean back in flannel and denim.

. "Coffee's almost ready."

"I'm not so old I can't hear. Did you remember to put the salt in?" He stretched and wished he didn't have to walk outside to pee.

"Aren't you the smart aleck this morning," the boy snapped, waving the salt shaker. He was young, too young to be the son of such an old man. People often thought the boy was his grandson, and he should have been. The years between them seemed too many, the distance long with little time left.

"You wanta fish the big hole up past the second bend today?"

"Uh huh." That was his favorite spot and the boy knew it. Hell, he ought to know it; he'd watched his old man catch a lot of kings in that hole.

"I guess if you can make coffee you can pick the fishin' hole." That was the rule since three years ago. The guy who gets up and makes the coffee gets to pick the hole. Last summer had been the first time the kid had beaten him. Now he did it all the time. Caught lots of nice silvers last fall, too. This could be his year for a king.

"I want a king today," said the boy. "I want the first salmon of the season."

"Yeah. Well, I don't see why not."

Breakfast was fast and easy, with the boy getting everything ready while the old man finished a third cup of coffee and stretched his knees. They didn't seem to bend too well anymore, and some mornings it took ten minutes just to stand up. The boy didn't seem to notice and that was fine with him.

By the time their travel trailer was out of sight, and they had clomped across the bridge and down the smooth path along the creek, his joints were working smoothly. They walked silently, letting the wet grass and fireweed slap at their legs and wet their pants above the hip waders. A few gulls were following the river looking for scraps. Somewhere downstream a big salmon splashed. Most of the campers were still in bed.

The morning was damp and cool with little promise of warming much through the day, but after twenty-odd years of fishing here, the old man knew how to dress for it and carried the hot thermos cup to hug like a wife. The cold didn't seem to bother the boy swaggering through the damp whips of grass that kept their hands wet and red on the handles of the tackle box and net. The man had taught him to pack the box well, so that it never rattled, and the lures, leaders and leads never tangled. The box was just one more thing that he had given over to the younger hands and energy.

A monstrous cottonwood bridged the creek right at the first bend, and they used it to pass to the other side where the big hole waited, and few fishermen would venture. As he clambered gingerly down from the log, the man was glad they had nearly reached the spot where he could sit on a stump and have another cup of coffee while the boy got his line in.

The boy rigged their lines with Dare Devils and began to work his gear into the riffle above the hole. The salmon would often lay in such holes and rest before charging up the riffles through the numerous shallows and sweepers that blocked the way to the upper spawning streams. The man wondered how many lures he'd tied for that kid, how many tangles they had cussed and cut at.

With hot coffee and his boy fishing in front of him, resting on the stump suited the old man. The first day of king season, a good time for the boy to hook his first, and he hoped the boy had remembered all the things he'd taught him about keeping the rod tip up and not cinching down the drag in a panic. They didn't wait long.

The third cast brought a yell from the boy. A big fin sliced up out of the hole like a rising submarine, bending the long pole and making the reel squeal as it took line. "Keep your tip up," said the old man, not bothering to rise. But the pole snapped back and the line went slack and it was over.

"Dammit, spit the hook!" complained the boy. That's all he said as he reeled in the loose line.

"That's OK. Put it right back in again. He'll stick around."

"I know. I know, Dad!" He didn't take his eyes off the river. "Big one, huh?"

"No fish has any size 'til he's on the beach. In the water they're just fish." He wanted to say more, about bragging on fish you never caught, about how the water lied about size, about the first one he'd caught in this river, but he didn't. He just leaned back and lit a cigarette, thinking he ought to put his line in, but, for the boy, he waited.

He looked downstream and saw two G.I.s wearing a mixture of orange raingear and camouflage pants that made his smile. They were young and carried their rods like rifles, falling into a cadence as they crossed the log and marched along the muddy trail. They paused as they came up on the hole and watched the boy lazily toss his line across the creek. He knew they were there but pretended to concentrate on his fishing while they talked to the old man.

"Any luck?" the tall one asked as he hooked one hand on the revolver at his hip.

"Nah. You?"

"Haven't wet a line yet." He searched the edge of the bank as if looking for clues. He gave his buddy a shrug.

"Going bear hunting?" The man waved his cigarette at the pistols hanging gunslinger fashion from their belts.

They were embarrassed for a moment, as if caught with shotguns in church. "Ah, these?" One gestured at his hip. "I hope not. But you never know. I heard there's lots of sign along here."

"I ain't wantin' to tangle with one o' them brownies armed with nothin' but a fishin' pole," said the smaller fellow. He looked up and down the river. "Besides, I like to shoot the big ones when I hook 'em."

"You must catch some damn big fish." The man looked at his son. The fishing line had gone taut again and the pole bent, but the salmon didn't run. The G.I.s failed to notice. The kid was waiting to set the hook.

"Hope so."

The old man smiled and stood, then pointed upstream. "You might try up around the next bend. They catch a fish there now and then."

"Yeah, that's where we're headed."

The man smiled again. He smiled until the pair passed through the brush and were out of sight, and he could no longer smell their aftershave.

"OK, son."

The boy pulled the pole up with a strong exertion, leaning back and bending like the graceful bow of determined fiberglass. The salmon dove for the bottom, stripping line from the screaming reel. Then the fish was up and lunging, lifting half its body out of the water.

The man breathed through his teeth. That was a big fish. Damn near big as the boy. He stood suddenly and walked toward the bank, but made himself circle back to the stump where he looked at the sky and wished the sun would break through the clouds and shine on his boy.

The fish was making a run upstream. Following all the instinct and passion of a thousand generations, it drove inland, away for the salt and back to the gravel bed where it hatched. The lure made it strike and now there was the pain and something, something strong and foreign, was trying to keep it from the nest upstream.

The boy followed through the grass, then the water, then the brush along the bank, where he slipped once on the mud and skidded to his rump atop a rosebush.

"Hoo shit!" he swore, but the man didn't reprimand his tongue. The riffle slowed the king, and the kid retrieved a lot of line. "We got him now, Dad!"

"Don't bet on it." The old hands worked the air frantically, reeling, lifting, holding. He unconsciously fought the fish himself, as if he had ripped the rod from his son's hand and taken the trembling handles in his own grip, a grip that could feel the size and strength and courage of the fish.

The salmon reversed its course and surged downstream, through the big hole and under the cottonwood log. "I'm going to lose him, Dad!"

"Maybe."

"He's just layin' there below the log. Maybe we can net him there.... Nah, forget that. What do I do? My line's gone under the log!"

The man didn't answer. He just walked downstream to the end of the log and moved off to the trees, where a ring of rocks surrounded a fire pit. Ten years ago, he had stomped down the grass and packed rocks from the creek to build the first fire there. The kid had been too young to come along then. Now the grass was all trampled or dead, and the deadfall and squaw kindling were gone for many yards away from the river, replaced by beer cans and styrofoam.

When the man looked up again, the boy had walked out on the log and was peering into the water at his opponent. He knelt on the rough bark and reached the tip of his pole down and under the log. With his other hand, he reached on the downstream side of the timber, stretching his fingers in a clever but unpropitious effort to pass the pole beneath the log. His arms were too short and the girth of the log too great, but he tried several times, as one will test a locked door hoping that some magic will change the invariable reality. His door remained locked.

The salmon sensed the limp line and scooted past the cottonwood in another attempt to go upstream, toward the nest, away from the pain. The boy swung himself erect and with the grace of a trapeze artist, extended the pole tip toward the heavens and retrieved line until the fish was again confronted by the drag and tension of the nylon.

Drawn by the commotion, the two gunslingers wrestled through the brush with such noisy abandon that the man feared for a moment that a bear had actually come to challenge their place on the creek. He was disappointed to see the returning G.I.s and ignored them by wandering away from the creek and gathering dry sticks.

"Hey, ya got one," observed the tall, talkative one.

The boy looked over from his position above them as he worked the pole against the dancing king. "Not yet."

"Hold on. I'll come out and give you a hand."

"Leave him alone." The old man walked from the trees holding a length of spruce limb like a bludgeon.

"No, it's OK. We'll give him a hand. Be a shame to lose a fish like that."

"There'll be other fish if he loses that one."

The young man turned and saw the flushed face and hunched stance of the fisherman. "That's too much fish for him. God, it's bigger than he is."

"Maybe. But I said leave him be!"

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I'm his father. And that's enough."

Looking back and forth from father to son to fish, the other soldier added his voice, "Why don't you help him then?" He could see the age in the old man, too old to be much help.

They all turned as the fish splashed and feinted upstream and then charged down through the hole, boiling the water and stealing line from the reel as he went.

"He don't need my help." The old man spurned the men's aggression by turning his back and breaking sticks over his knee, piling them in the ring of rocks. It was as if in turning his back he had passed beyond the creek and the fish and boy and the young men.

The spectators paced beside the river, afraid to challenge the old man's control of the bank. "Look at that! He's going to lose him!"

"Help him, you old son-of-a-bitch!"

The old man struck a match and without turning said, "Yeah, he might lose him, but if it was the last fish in the river, I wouldn't take that away from him."

The boy now hung over the log on his belly, fighting the fish with his pole tip just above the water. He drew back the pole until it bowed nearly double. Then he gulped a bucket of air and leaped head first into the creek.

The watchers gasped. The old man laughed and felt young again.

A denim-covered rump poked out of the creek, then bobbed quickly beneath the log and out of sight. The hole was deep but covered little of the creek bottom, so the boy soon rose, gasping in air as he fought in water up to his hips a few yards below the log. Never losing concentration or relaxing the tension, he had gained position on his prey and was back hauling slack. He braced his legs as if he held the reins of the creek itself.

In fast-sweeping motions, he brought the rod tip to the water, cranking the reel and then dragging the pole skyward, harvesting the line foot by foot.

Finally, he maneuvered the tired king salmon into shallow water where he cornered the fish against the bank and awkwardly leaped onto his catch and wrestled with it in the shallows. Brown silt stained the rolling water. His right hand, and then the left jabbed the gill racks, and with a splashing fury, he tumbled out of the creek onto the trail.

Blood poured out of the gills and down the boy's arms as they wrestled on the creek bank. The tail flashed and swiveled as the king salmon reached blindly for water, but, out of his element, the fish's tenacity broke quickly, and the boy dragged him up the trail to the fire where his father waited.

The two strangers had disappeared upstream as soon as they saw the fish wasn't as big as they had thought. The man could hear them complaining about the crazy old fisherman.

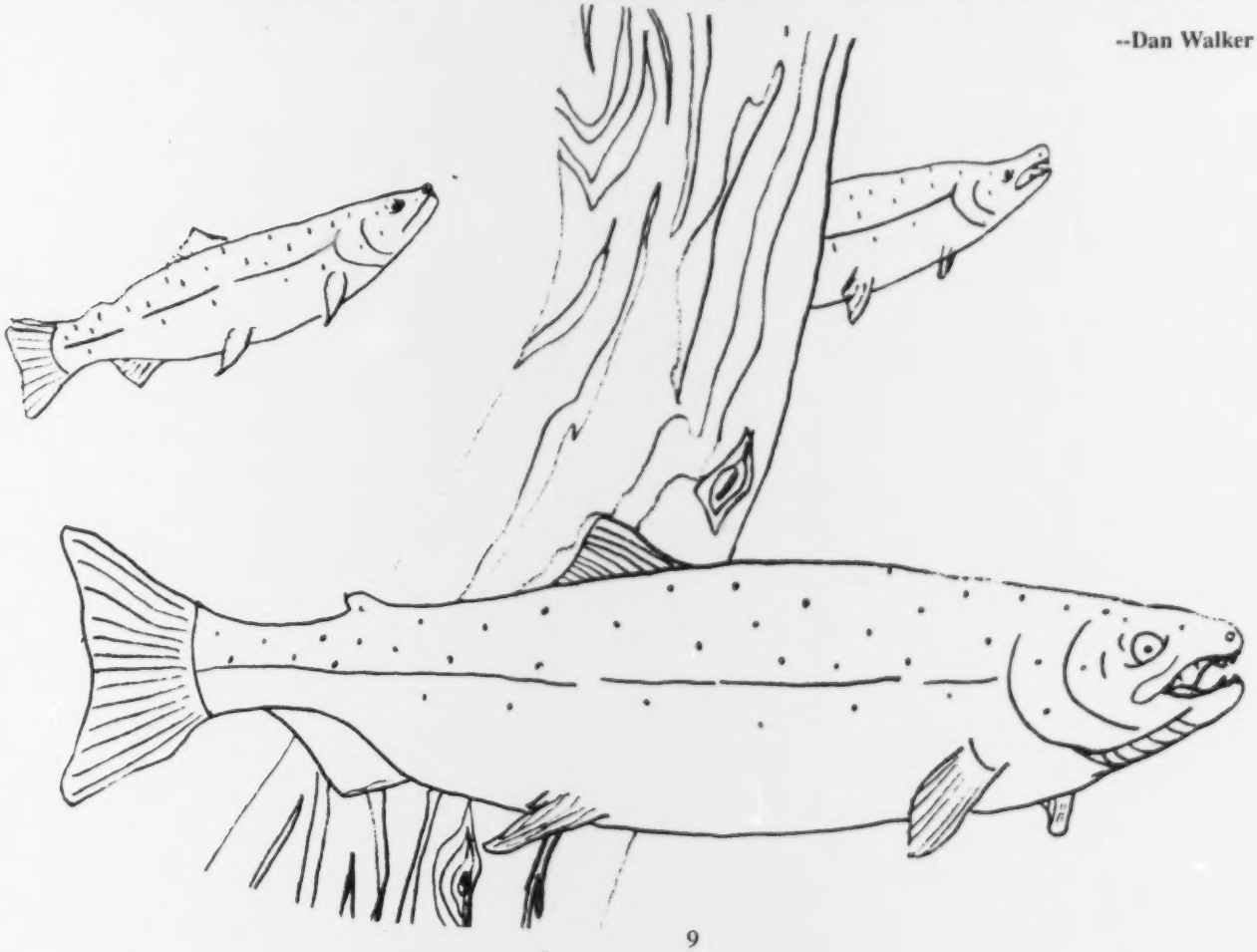
"Nice fish."

Straddling the blaze and shivering, the boy stripped down to his T-shirt and glared at his dad. "Yeah. Thanks for all the help."

The old man handed the last cup of coffee to his son, then draped his coat across wet shoulders. "I did help. Built you this nice warm fire, didn't I? And now, I'm going down to the creek and clean that fish for you."

The old man didn't even wet a lure that day, and the next morning the boy let his dad get up and make them coffee for a change. But it didn't taste as good as his own, and he had been awake first anyway, listening to the harsh rattle of his father's snores and hanging on each one as if it might be the last. He wished in a strange simple way that the fish had gotten away, and his father had yelled at him for not playing it right. He wished that for one more summer he could still be the one sitting on the stump watching the fisherman in the water.

--Dan Walker



'91

Middle Rip, Cook Inlet

It has been cloudy now
for a long, long while.
The sea is building.
The unexpected blow
always seems to come from the south,
and is always the worst.

From shore you cannot see
the middle rip;
cannot tell how bad it is;
waves crashing in all directions at once,
moving mountains of green and gray.

And even if you were there
fighting the wheel to keep her headed in the right direction
riding them up and over, throttle up and back,
watching more of what's next than what's now,
you couldn't tell whether the changing tide
would make it lay down or stir it up more.

I've run away from the middle rip more than once:
Turned around, saying,
"This is unfishable!"
Gritted my teeth and hung on to the wheel
as the boat came around in the trough,
trying to time it so the smallest wave was the one that hit,
watching it come, out the side window,
wishing the boat would turn faster
knowing it wouldn't.
Hung on harder as the boat slammed over,
and the forks and the knives and toothpaste
and coffee pots and binoculars and magazines
(an instant before all just calmly riding along)
launched off the shelves and the table and the stove
and flew everywhere around the cabin.

I've even set my gear in the middle rip
when it was kicking up, saying,
"Ahh, it'll come down."
I've seen my deckhand hanging on on the back deck,
trying to set the gear without a hangup,
without a backlash, at a 45-degree angle,
looking at me as if I knew what I was doing,
and I wondering the same.

It's not so bad, fishing the middle rip,
but towing the gear in heavy weather depends upon your mettle
and your nerve;
and you know eventually you've got to pick up:
got to put on the oilskins and pull your hat on harder
so it doesn't blow off, and button the top button
no matter how tight, and the cool press of the fabric
against your neck reminds you of how much you wish
you didn't have to go out there into the wind and the rollers
and make the boat go stern first into them.

So you open the door and the wind tries to take your breath away,
but you won't let it, and you hold on to the lifeline and dance
to the back deck on the back of a water-born bronco.
You pull your gloves on as you eye the seas from the stern of your boat
(your boat, your machine, full of its warmth and life and power,
yes, power to pull all that net stretching into the gray unfriendly light
until you can't see it any longer, but you know there's twice as much
out there as you can see, and your boat can get it all back, and more:
it can deliver you safely to home).
And it's you and your boat against all this space and wind and water
and you come alive
and slam your foot down on the treadle with a vengeance and a
smile, and the air is cold, and the sea slaps the stern like
an insult, and you are drenched in salt water and you laugh and
you whoop and you yell the insult back at the sea.

When it blows,
standing upon the shore,
you can't see the middle rip;
you can't tell how bad it is.

--Patrick S. Dixon

Patrick S. Dixon teaches photography, English, and journalism at Kenai Centrol High School, where he has taught since 1979. "I am a commercial fisherman in the summer; I drift gillnet for red salmon on Cook Inlet. This poem was an emotional response to the anticipation of losing my fishing season in 1989 due to the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Most of my writing over the years (I have written as long as I can remember) has been strongly rooted in feeling. To me, writing is a release necessary to sanity."

Memories of the FV Beaver

At low tide
the old fishing vessel *Beaver*
is almost completely exposed,
the red paint chipped and peeling
kelp clinging to the warped decks
rusted winch rotting.

Someone abandoned it
months ago
just off the Samson Dock,
and during a storm
it sank
in shallow water.

For weeks we expected
that someone would
rescue it,
resuscitate it,
bring it back to life.

Now it lies there
not quite dead
almost interred
by the high tide
barnacles encrusting its wooden sides
seaweed gradually covering the gunwales
the planks swelling and shrinking

the life ebbing away slowly,
while it groans out
its recurring salt water memories.

--David Jaynes

David Jaynes currently teaches at Kodiak College. He has been active in the ASWC since its inception, as a teacher leader and presenter. His poetry has appeared in various small press publications, including past Shaping the Landscape *journals.*

The Ghosts of Woodbury Hall

For the third time in an hour, Professor Edward Chambers forgot what he was saying, distracted by Paul Songren's indolent slouch in a scarred desk at the back of the room. Paul's posture and sandy good looks reminded him strongly of Professor Bruce Munson as an undergraduate a dozen years ago; and Chambers couldn't think of Munson without feeling the pressure of that man's present bid for tenure. As department head, Chambers would have to write the damning facts in the tenure report due the next day.

Stalling with a thoughtful mumble, Chambers tugged at his kinky white beard, brushed away the chalk dust from his sweater, and ran a forefinger down his sketchy notes. But he was too slow. A number of students, including Paul, closed their notebooks and stretched.

"Is the Woodbury ghost really walking again?" one of them asked.

Chambers conceded the last minutes of class to the ghost, as he did whenever rumors of its return scurried through old Woodbury Hall. He believed the Victorian building's musty rooms, wainscoted corridors and worn marble stairs deserved a ghost as much as any hall in England, even though the ghost usually turned out to be a squirrel or bat instead of the deceased graduate student still working out an incomplete, as tradition had established. Chambers smiled to himself, expecting that this group, like all others, would retell the old stories and share the new ones they'd been creating in the dorms and bars. He hadn't expected Paul Songren to straighten, follow and eventually join the discussion. Perhaps the lethargy was due to the man's obvious chest cold.

"The night custodian says it smells like mothballs this time," Paul said.

"Oh, that's just Maynard!" someone scoffed. "He probably just unpacked his long johns for the winter."

That turned conversation to Minnesota winters, so Chambers dismissed class, thinking how much Woodbury students were like Woodbury ghosts. New ones were simply a variation on an old theme. That was why he was so disquieted by Paul's similarities to Bruce Munson. Years ago, Chambers would have shrugged off this concern, waiting along with the rest of the department for latent talent to prove itself. But not for years now, and certainly not today. Now he believed in testing a student's potential early and often, to discourage those who could become a Munson--and to spare department heads like himself from having to stop a progression that should never have begun.

He decided to catch Paul later that day. But the man gathered his parka and backpack so slowly that Chambers had to wipe the spotty blackboard and play with his notes to justify waiting. Finally he asked casually, "How's it going, Paul?"

"OK."

"Mmmm." Chambers studied the pouched blue eyes and the sagging shoulders, wondering just how young people became so devastated. Sometimes, conversations with Paul were spirited. "I've noticed your big pack. You aren't still living in your car, are you?"

"No. I found a place at the end of October."

"Good." Chambers didn't ask where, though he wished to know if Paul, like Munson, had looked for a soft heart to use. Pulling nervously at his beard and hating himself for stooping to subtle manipulation, he let the silence grow, knowing his stature as a professor would keep Paul from leaving and might make him uneasy enough to offer more information.

Paul shifted his pack, glancing through the door and covering a long, rumbling cough. When he could talk, he said, "After your response to my first papers, I cut my hours at the Pantry. I can't quit because they feed me, but I can get by until my spring loan comes through. It's hard to study where I live. And your research assignment. ... Can I see you later?"

"Until six," Chambers agreed, uneasy because showing interest in a student's personal life sometimes prompted requests for special consideration. Leadership was a damned ticklish business; in trying to prevent another Munson, he might be encouraging one.

Chambers watched Paul shuffle into the hallway, wondering if one of the many students who greeted him by name had sneaked him into an already crowded and noisy apartment. That might explain the exhausted look. The Pantry job suggested dedication, but some students worked just to support their social life.

Chambers shrugged and left for his office. On the way, a tenure committee member halted him to ask,

"Have you decided yet?"

"In the morning," he mumbled, irritated that she'd mentioned the matter around students. People needed to think harder before they acted. Already the students within earshot appeared to be speculating; in ten minutes, half a dozen bizarre rumors about Chambers' "imminent decision" would be circulating. Chambers was leaving the university. Chambers, the Old Bear, was going to reject so-and-so's thesis. Chambers had caught the ghost and was banishing it to hell.

Everyone would know in the morning.

Involved in their private dramas, the students would never guess it was Professor Munson whose fate awaited the morning--Munson, who'd been through everything they were going through and much more. They'd never dream that their scuttlebutt about Munson's short classes and easy grades had been heard by those deciding his fate.

In his office, Chambers pushed aside the report on his blotter, but its very presence canceled the invitation of his leather chair. He turned his back to stand at the window and stared into a bleak Minnesota December.

"Professor Chambers?"

"Mmmm." He turned to face the young woman, glancing at the clock as he turned. Ten minutes almost exactly.

"Is it true you're leaving the university?"

"Don't believe everything you hear, Chris."

"Well, I'm registering, and I...I wanted to take your advanced exposition class this spring."

He hesitated before saying, "Professor Munson teaches that, too." It was a cheap shot, but he wanted to test the situation one more way. Chris was a good student.

"I'd just rather take it from you."

He regretted her obvious embarrassment. Was she afraid to admit disrespect for Munson, or was she awed by the powerful Chambers? "If you're determined to suffer, sign up for my class."

She thanked him and left him wondering if he'd managed to answer her question but not destroy the mystery pulsing in the hallway. Rumors were oxygen in the blood of the place. The students would enjoy arguing whether another university would want the Old Bear. He was pondering that himself lately, thinking about unemployed professors. He'd hate to be Munson.

Not that he could be. Munson was an accident of people's good will, a man who'd reached the final gate by being too pleasant to disappoint, too promising to dismiss. He didn't deserve tenure as he hadn't deserved his teaching position, or the graduate assistantship years ago, or the degree before that, or the borderline passing grades before that. Everyone on the committee knew it, but each of them had passed Munson at least once; and now they felt as if they'd made a promise. Chambers, who no longer followed generous whims, would have to save them all.

He sat abruptly and scowled at the tenure report, unaware that Paul had entered the office until he heard the wracking cough. Peering over his bifocals, he invited Paul to sit down, hoping the man would ask for enlightenment or direction rather than a modified assignment. Paul had occasionally done exceptional work. At any rate, his presence delayed having to do the report.

"Could I borrow your Morgan text on Renaissance ghosts, Dr. Chambers? The library copy is missing."

Chambers turned, searched his shelves, and handed him the book, glad to concede Round One to Paul for diligence. He said, "I'm surprised you know about Morgan. Been out of print for years."

Paul tried to look alert, but covered a yawn. "Actually, I looked through it one day when...when you were out. Was that OK?"

"Fine. Things are coming together, overwise?" Round Two for initiative; perhaps Paul was truly different from Munson, who would have casually brought up Renaissance ghosts and garnered ideas and sources from Chambers' conversation. Munson's paper, if finished, would have been a thin echo.

"Yeah, I've done one draft. Morgan's info will fill some weak spots."

"Do you think we have a Renaissance ghost here?"

Paul laughed agreeably. "I don't know. Does it moan and ask to be avenged?"

"Actually, it doesn't do standard ghost things. Doesn't howl, doesn't make big messes, doesn't appear to reliable witnesses. One year it ate a couple student chairs, but that year it was a porcupine. Mostly it makes footsteps in the night for awhile and then goes away. I rather like this mothball twist."

"Me, too, it ..." Paul lapsed into a long cough.

"Have you tried to get cough medicine at the health service?"

"Yeah, they gave me some good lozenges, but they're expensive. I use them at night so I don't disturb people."

Maynard, the night custodian, interrupted by suddenly leaning his head and shoulders into the room, his hands braced on the door jambs. The gray chest hair showing through the neck of his work suit belied the presence of mothballed long johns.

"Just checking the window lock, Ed," Maynard said. "Don't need any spooks getting in."

"I'll be sure to lock up when I leave."

"Uh huh. You going soon?"

"Yes, but I'll be back to work on something tonight, so don't be surprised at noises coming from my office."

Maynard snorted. "I'm not scared of this spook. Just see if I don't get it one of these nights." He chuckled and pushed himself from the doorway.

"There goes a real romantic," Paul commented, hoisting his army knapsack to leave. The pack swung sideways and spilled some of its contents. He scooped toothpaste, chest rub, a razor and an aspirin bottle from the floor, explaining, "It's hard to clean up where I live, so I use the Phys Ed building."

Chambers nodded sympathetically. Living where one couldn't study or wash wasn't much better than camping in a car. Young Munson had often said that student life was a student's biggest enemy.

Moments later Chambers was striding through Woodbury's parking lot, contemplating the number of vehicles that looked as strained as their student owners. Pausing at the feeble station wagon he thought was Paul's, he noted stacks of folded clothing in the back and remembered the hours he himself had once spent at laundromats. His polished sedan in his reserved space accentuated his current comfort. He'd wanted and earned his power, which helped him to defeat excuses, to push his students to achieve and discover. But today it oppressed him. He felt a sudden, strong desire to see his wife and three teenagers, who found him unimposing and bullied him according to their right.

As Chambers unlocked the door, Munson drove his Saab into an adjoining space with his usual dash. Chambers straightened and waited for the urgent thing Munson always had to say, preferring to face the man rather than speak up to him through a car window.

Leaping from the Saab, Munson called, "God, I'm glad I caught you, Ed. I just had a great idea that could put us on the academic map if I just had a year off to develop it."

"Sounds great. Is it related to your current research?"

"No, no, something completely new. The details on the other project are coming together, and one of these days I'll be able to write them down. But this new idea is better. If we could just delay the tenure decision a little longer...."

Chambers wondered how much Munson's energetic style had influenced his success. When Munson was worked up, his enthusiasm was so attractive, his optimism so difficult to deny.

"Sorry, Bruce. You know we can't. You only get the one extension."

Munson capitulated with the smile that melted the freshmen girls. "Well, things look good, don't you think?"

"Sorry, I can't discuss that. I know it's hell to wait, Bruce. Good night." He opened his door abruptly, disgusted at his apologetic tone.

Munson waved cheerily with his leather driving cap.

* * * * * * * * * * *

It was after ten when Chambers returned to Woodbury. Light spilled from the arched strong casements where overheads had been left on after night classes. Maynard would already be shutting the old place down, starting in the upper east wing and working toward the west basement. Chambers had outstayed him many times.

By night the hulking building with its glowing cupola seemed even more suited to haunting. He thought of the mothball ghost and hoped it would last a long time. He'd never caught one of these harmless illusions himself, never tried. Someone else always found them out and forced Chambers, as department head, to exorcise them. Bats, porcupines, pranksters--he'd regretted the loss of each one.

Inside, Chambers began the report immediately, reviewing evaluations and accomplishments, trying not to accentuate the department's foolish tolerance. As he worked, he realized Maynard was shutting the wings down in random order instead of following his usual routine. Every fifteen minutes Maynard descended one set of stairs and ascended another. The spook would have to be clever to escape him tonight.

At one point between Maynard's inspections, something scurried down the hall to the east stairs, leaving a whiff of camphor behind it. Chambers willed the apparition away, muttering, "Do your stuff, ghost. You have six wings and an attic to hide in. For God's sake, don't get caught and make me eliminate you along with Munson."

Minutes later, Maynard followed in the ghost's path. Chambers completed the work-history section and moved on to his evaluation, which progressed easily because for two weeks he'd been mentally phrasing and rephrasing a paragraph that was straightforward, firm and as kind as possible. By the time Maynard passed again, he was writing the recommendation. One decisive sentence sufficed there.

He proofread the document, signed it and threw it face down on the blotter. His chair squeaked plaintively as he swiveled to look out the window, and squeaked again as he spun abruptly away from the dark, mirroring glass. He couldn't face his reflection just then.

He was sealing the form into a Manila envelope when Paul slid into the room, easing the door shut and standing against it, breathing fast and working his jaws. He carried a sleeping roll and his pack; his shoes hung around the neck of his open parka. He smelled like mothballs.

Outside the door, Maynard's footsteps rasped to the cleaning closet at the opposite end of the corridor.

Chambers didn't speak. As quickly as he phrased a question in his mind, he knew the answer. Camphor chest rub. Expensive lozenges, only at night. Hide and seek with Maynard.

The air in the office grew pungent as Maynard pulled out the floor scrubber and started on the hall. Chambers stared at Paul, who sucked his lozenge and met the stare. No plea, no belligerence. Just a grasp of his whole damned unequal position. A patient, unflinching, flesh-and-blood ghost who lacked any power over the living, facing a man who had just released a doctor of literature. Both of them needing redemption.

The scrubber hummed insistently in the hall. Chambers rose, took three steps, and lifted the window. His reflection disappeared and the freshness of the early winter poured in.

Murmuring, he gestured outward. "Maynard will be gone by midnight. My window won't be locked."

Minutes later, when Maynard's scrubber bumped the office door open, Chambers stretched and reached for the open sash.

"This old place needs airing by the end of the day," he said, smiling. "Don't worry about the lock, I'm taking care of it."

--Barbara Christian

Barbara Christian lives and writes in Kenai, where she is also assistant professor of English and Speech Communication at Kenai Peninsula College. Her non-fiction work has appeared in several professional journals, and her stories and poems have appeared in Heartland, Shaping the Landscape, Wheelwatch Companions II *and* III, *and* Alaska Quarterly Review.

Gleanings

I read in Leviticus today
about leaving the corners of your field for the stranger
and the gleanings of your harvest to the hungry.
So, when I saw you, I smiled a little wider,
and kept the harsh words at bay, and offered you
the wrinkled dollar in my pocket.
Did you understand?
Or did you wake up reading an eye for an eye?
Do you muzzle your oxen?

--Bambi Hill

A Moment of Delight

Once I discovered the man and his book, there was no turning back. I wanted to know him and write as well as he. "I have no genius," he once said, "but I have one hell of a lot of talent."

John Boynton Priestley (1894-1984), born in Bradford, Yorkshire, England, was a man of protean talents: novelist, literary and social critic, essayist, playwright, producer, actor and broadcaster. He's probably best remembered for novels like *The Good Companions* and *Angel Pavement*, and plays such as *Dangerous Corner* and *An Inspector Calls*. Even though I may never read the bulk of his life's work, I'm confident I discovered a fragment of his soul in a little volume he published in 1949.

The book is quite small; a collection of short, one-paragraph essays. When I first picked it up, at a library used-book sale, the title on its tan dust jacket intrigued me--*Delight: Reflections by J.B. Priestley*. Underneath was an excerpt from a poem by Walter de la Mare:

Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour. Let not night
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber
Till to delight
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing....

Throughout the book's one-hundred-seventy pages, Priestley extends his blessing to some of his life's delights. He begins, however, with a preface called "A Grumbler's Apology."

"Probably I arrived here a malcontent," he writes, "convinced that I had been sent to the wrong planet." Priestley writes that he seemed to be created for the part of a curmudgeon: sagging face, weighty underlip, rumbling resonant voice. At five feet, nine inches, and two hundred pounds, he was broad-shouldered and dark-haired with a boxer's chin. His bushy eyebrows hovered over keen, reptilian eyes that some called saurian.

"Money could not buy a better grumbling outfit," he writes.

One evening at a party, a young woman overhead him grumbling as usual. She fiercely assailed him, telling him to go home rather than spoil other people's fun. "I was taken aback, and may be said to have stayed aback ever since," he writes. She had misjudged him and that was disturbing. How many other like that young woman, overhearing his grumbling, wondered: "Does this chap never enjoy anything?" Priestley's response to that question is this little book.

Months after I bought the book, I opened it at random to its shortest paragraph, "Three Lighthouses," in which Priestley describes a view from his home on the Isle of Wight: "From some of our windows on a clear night you can see the flashes of three lighthouses. So what? I don't know; and don't feel like arguing about it. Try some other page."

And I did, for page after page.

Priestley was always delighted at "Getting Out of New York," a city he couldn't come to terms with. "I don't know what it means," he writes. "In this city my feet are never solidly on the ground." Upon leaving, he would often spend time in Arizona, where he came to love the desert.

He reveled in "Orchestras Tuning Up," observing how an oriental visitor attending a symphony for the first time mistook the tuning up for the opening piece. "It is, if you like, a chaos caught at the supreme moment, immediately before Creation. Everything of order and beauty shortly to be revealed is already in it."

Priestley delighted in "Frightening Civil Servants." "I am the kind of man nearly all senior civil servants dislike on sight," he argues, "and indeed some of them dislike me, I gather, even without seeing me."

Priestley's other delights, one hundred eleven in all, include such ecstasies as "Shopping in Small Places," "Detective Stories in Bed," "Charade," "Money for Nothing," "Giving Advice," "Children's Games," "Delight in Writing," "Not Going," "Waking to Smell Bacon" and "Lawn Tennis," of which he writes, "It's the only way to get up a proper sweat."

As somewhat of a grumbler myself, I sympathize with Priestley. Grumblers as a class tend to be constantly misjudged, often misinterpreted. I comfort myself with the theory that the most disagreeable of us are really the most sensitive at heart. I can live with that. But the fact is, as Priestley taught me, I'm a grumbler. And I can live with that, having now read and reread his delightful apology to the grumbling life.

In taking a page from J.B.'s book, I have recently written down some of my own life delights. Priestley dedicated his book to his family, "With the Old Monster's Love." I dedicate what follows to those whom I may insult tomorrow, assuring them I love life as much or better than the next fellow.

"Touching Down," the moment those tiny wheels first rumble and screech against runway pavement. I don't like to "terminate" a flight; I'd rather just land, gently or otherwise. Aerodynamics aside, I'll never really understand how a multi-ton vehicle seating two hundred people and traveling three hundred miles an hour can stay four miles up in the air. Take-offs and landings scare me. That's when more crashes occur. The flight itself is often relaxing, unless I actually think about where I am and what's happening. Still, thoughts of eventually landing hide in the pit of my stomach. It's only when the wheels touch down that my heart delights in the safety of solid ground.

"Sleeping Children," especially my own. Young ones are on the move so much, my two-year-old in particular, that catching them, really seeing them, is as fruitless as capturing a firefly's glow in a jar. Children's facial features actually change in sleep. Muscles and breathing relax, eyes shut, bodies sprawl out in the most awkward positions. They are so fragile in their silent stillness, and as I touch a tiny hand or stroke a sweaty cheek I am moved toward delight.

"Armchair Adventure Reading," especially during stormy weather. Priestley called it "Reading in Bed About Foul Weather." "With the windows rattling away and hailstones drumming at the paper in the fireplace," he writes, "snug in bed except for one elbow, I have traveled thousands of murky miles with these fellows, braving the foulest nights, together crying Bah!

I sit in my recliner in winter reading these perilous adventure stories, after stoking the coals in the woodstove. I feel cozy and safe. This type of reading is especially delightful a day or two after a disastrous canoe trip, an ill-fated hike or a cursed fishing expedition. Once I've dried off, warmed up, and tended to my scrapes and bruises, I gravitate toward the armchair to read, taking special pleasure in empathizing with other sufferers as I sip my tea.

"Personal Letters," writing and receiving them, especially from old friends. Writing them is freeing, more liberating than my personal journal. Those sent to me I read several times before replying, tasting every word, savoring each sentence. I enjoy those times before radio, television and telephones when, as an evening's entertainment, one dipped quill or nib into a favorite inkwell and leisurely--almost reverently--composed a letter, a real epistle, in delight.

"The Right Book," finding it. Usually I'm intensely involved in a research or writing project. I wander into a used-book store or discover a small town library book sale. After about twenty minutes, I find it. *The* book. Though I've never heard of its title or author, it turns out to be just the one I need to complete my project. Synchronicity, Carl Jung would call it. I simply call it delightful.

"Peaceful Sleep," my own, in the midst of life's problems. Even when I'm especially restless I've learned to relax. Problems can wait another seven or eight hours. Nothing can be done now anyway. I drift in and out of the sometimes blissful, sometimes threatening world of images and emotions. That's how I spend nearly a third of my life. I may as well find delight in it.

"Making Soup." For Priestley it was stew, but the experience is similar. "You might travel from Truro to Inverness, even today," he writes, "and be offered nothing better than or as good as my stew." The same is true, of course, of my soup. Most often I make my own stock, only reverting to a dehydrated mix when rushed. The big thrill comes, however, from knowing I'm using only leftovers. For days, I cruise by the refrigerator, opening, peeking, waiting for just the moment when remnants seem to dominate the shelves. I create my stock from two turkey drumsticks and grab the remains of a salad: red and green peppers, slimy scallion bits, cucumber slices, tomato squares--even lettuce and spinach leaves. I may use some spare lunchmeat, ham, baloney or chicken. A few hotdogs is a rare find. My wife used to wonder why I kept raw potatoes, turnips and elbow macaroni in the refrigerator. Now she knows. To seek them in the pantry is not allowed. I season it with parsley, garlic, mint, perhaps a dash of wine and a pinch of my delight. The conglomeration boils, simmers, sets. Unfortunately, my wife doesn't like soup. That's why we had children. I needed people to gobble gratefully my noble creation.

"After finishing a piece of work that has been long and rather difficult," Priestley reflects, "I have a sense of satisfaction that can expand into delight." As I near the end of this essay, short as it may be, I can share J.B.'s

sentiment. His joy wasn't in the greatness of the work he created. Indeed, he often wondered if it had any value at all and whether he hadn't been wasting his time. Rather, his delight came from the sense of release. "I have been in prison with this one idea, and now I feel I am free," he writes.

For an interlude, perhaps two days or a week, Priestley was discharged from his imagination's prison. But it wouldn't be for long. There was always another idea to be developed: a novel, a play, an essay, a short story. "And so for a little while, before the key grates in the lock again," he writes, "I am out...with mountains of treasure before my dazzled eyes. Yes, there comes a moment--just a moment--of delight."

--Douglas R. Capra

Doug Capra, who came to Alaska from Massachusetts twenty years ago, teaches at Seward High School, and part-time at Kenai Peninsula College. As a freelance writer and photographer, he has had numerous articles and essays published, most recently in the December 1991 issue of Alaska Magazine. *This summer, he will complete his master's degree in writing from Northeastern's University Institute on Writing and Teaching at Martha's Vineyard.*

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HOM '90

Old Woman

Your sewing machines
say so much about you,
old woman.

I can see that once
you sewed a lot and
your people respected you
as a mother and grandmother.
And your kettle and metal cup,
dented and chipped and ancient,
tell me you fixed
a tasty brew of tea
for friends and neighbors from across the bay.

Now, on this windy knoll of lonely tundra
these cherished things of yours
sit and rust at crazy angles half-buried
in the melting snow and mosses of spring
beside an archaic gray-weathered Russian cross
surrounded by hoary others
three-boarded crucifixes
creased and scarred with wind and time leaning out to
a deserted fishing beach
where shore ice still holds thick and strong
and Old Squaw ducks careen and crash on a choppy sea.

Your cross tells me this was Cossack country once
(so they thought),
long ago,
old woman...where they came for otter pelts
and Yupik souls
and left your graves to icy rains and driving snows
of winter gales.

Nearby a fisherman's hut perches stoic
and silent against the horizon
reminding me of the living,
and the stir and thrill of summer here
when sockeye salmon jump again and
net lines stretch and bulge and measure the worth of men
and women.

A Lapland longspur teeters and sways
nervously on the windy corner of your Russian cross,
just arrived and waiting too...trying to sing to secure
a place on the tundra
and a future for his own,
flitting off in the buffet and eddy of icy air
that still carries
the harsh breath of winter.

Old woman,
your sewing machines say so much
about you.

-- Frank Keim

Frank Keim is a social studies and Russian language teacher who lives and teaches in Marshall. He has taught for thirteen years in Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, Emmonak and Marshall. Before coming to Alaska, he lived and worked in South America for eight years. He is originally from near Toronto, Canada, and has been an Alaska resident for thirty-one years. "Poetry has always been a way for me to express my deepest and most intense emotions about nature," he writes.

Mist Memories

Great-Grandma's house sat at the junction of our little town. If you walked straight down the road, past the music teacher's house and her dilapidated old barn, past a row of tiny cottages that housed two mangy boys and their straggly old dog Prince, you would come to my house, where I lived with my parents and nine brothers and sisters.

Next door was the Mist General Store. Since I can remember, the two large store windows displayed the Philip Morris boy, a Lucky Strike bulls eye, and the Coca Cola girl. Inside, the only things that varied were the issue of *Boy's Life* and *Field and Stream*. In the corner, old issues were stacked for those who wanted to catch up on their reading.

Sometimes Mom would send one of us over to buy a half pound of baloney for Dad's sandwiches. We would watch the owner wipe his big hands on a white butcher's apron. With a meat slicer he would cut the thickness he knew Mom preferred, wrap it in white, waxed butcher paper, and seal it tightly with masking tape. Once in awhile he'd give the errand runner a jaw breaker or piece of gum.

I have many memories of living in Mist, but the most special moments I remember are the visits I made to Great-Grandma's. Sometimes, in late fall, as I walked to her house, I crashed my rubber boots through as many iced puddles as I could splinter. I savored the sound of cracking under foot. I prolonged the assault as long as I could, slamming my foot through, making the biggest splash and leaving behind a trail of shattered puddles.

Great-Grandma lived with Uncle Ray and Aunt Alma. Off and on they gave room and board to one of the school's two teachers. I'm not sure if they were well off, but by Mist standards they had the biggest and best-kept house.

Alma and Great-Grandma wore printed house dresses, support stockings, and cap-sleeved aprons. Aunt Alma's apron was wide to allow for her round figure. Often I found my eyes diverted from her intriguing soft middle and down to her ankles. They were wide, too, and spilled over her sturdy shoes. It was hard to figure how her feet, swollen and padded with corn and bunion plasters, fit into those orthopedic arch savers.

Sometimes it pained me to watch her walk. She ambled side to side and huffed and puffed as she came and went. She was always perspiring and had to rest every few steps, but she was a great cook and her shrill voice was fun to listen to.

Great-Grandma was taller and more slender. Her skin stretched tight over thin, blue veins and old muscle. It was easy to see she worked hard all her life. She loved to be outdoors and had been a homesteader in Columbia County. Grandma didn't talk much or see very well, but she always smiled. Though I heard she and Alma didn't always agree, both had something in common. They doted on Uncle Ray.

He wasn't around much, but when he was, he had the best-smelling cigars. Uncle Ray was a big, friendly man with a handsome, shiny, bald head. He dressed in beautifully tooled leather boots and wore string ties with a myrtlewood or agate clasp. He was in the mill business. Dad used to say that Aunt Alma had expensive tastes in furniture, china, crystal, and other doodads. After I was grown, I figured that when Uncle Ray returned from his long trips there was some guilt to pay, and that's why he didn't complain much about Aunt Alma's ways.

Both Great-Grandma and Aunt Alma were strict Seventh Day Adventists. They traveled every week to Clatskanie to attend church meetings. Alma drove the dark, rain-slicked, twisty mountain road braving log trucks, rock slides and deer. With Great-Grandma, their donation of handmade braided rag rugs, and prayer pamphlets in tow, she somehow managed to make each trip. Everyone agreed it was a miracle those two women didn't get killed on that treacherous road because Alma was known to doze at the wheel due to medication for her various ailments. But they were fearless, and Great-Grandma had faith.

Sometimes, in the late afternoon, Great-Grandma could be found in their living room sitting in her rocker with her crocheted afghan over her lap, rocking gently to the tick of the cherry wood grandfather clock. Her smokey, brown wig was set perfectly, with tight curls held in place by an invisible hair net. With her Bible folded under her hands, she seemed at peace.

Great-Grandma was an early riser. She and Alma would spend their mornings collecting old clothes to rip into strips for their colorful rugs. They would cut, tear, wash, iron, and hand sew large oval rugs of cotton, tweeds, and wool. These were prized by everyone who had them. Two of them warmed the cold floors of our living room. Though burdened with severe cataracts and arthritis, Great-Grandma made rag rugs almost up to

the time she died.

In the warm months their summer kitchen, detached from the back of the house, was where they canned fruits and vegetables. Inside there was running water for the sink, two long counters with cupboards lined with yellow, flowered oil cloth, and an old stove for the canners to simmer.

Once I remember helping wash jars and boil lids and rubber rings. I loved the smell of hot syrup steaming over the old stove and dreamily watched Great-Grandma pour the sweet golden liquid over the peaches. I looked forward to climbing up the small step stool to wash the sticky counters and sip left-over juice. When we were finished, we would stand back and admire the colored jars of peaches, pears, pickles, beets, beans, applesauce, and other lovely preserves.

Great-Grandma and Alma saved all the peelings and added them to their compost pile. The contribution of manure from the barn, and trout and salmon heads from Uncle Ray's fishing trips, would also be used as fertilizer in Great-Grandma's vegetable and flower gardens.

The flower garden was around the side of the house beyond the cement bird bath. This patch of blooms had the most vivid colors with velvet reds and radiant yellows. Similar colors were clustered with varieties of marigolds, nasturtiums, chrysanthemums, gladioluses, roses, and other sensational blooms. There was a symmetry to the beauty. The garden had a lovely fragrance of blossoms, green stems, dew, and rich Oregon soil. That soil was turned over and over until the compost became a soft mulch. Then each seed and bulb would be planted with great care. The result was spectacular. Later, the flowers would stand in full bloom sometimes staked with stringed posts. When the buds opened, a bouquet wrapped in damp newspaper was sent home with one of us. There the flowers were enjoyed as slanted stems drank thirstily from a pitcher or mason jar.

Great-Grandma and Aunt Alma were vegetarians. They cooked grand meals with a variety of meatless dishes. They were marvelous cooks, especially when it came to cookies, cakes, and bread. Nevertheless, I fondly remember their casseroles. They were wonderful, but the ingredients have always remained a mystery to me.

I miss these women very much, especially Great-Grandma. She seemed an ancient lady then, but I loved her so much. Though she is gone, her memory will be eternal to me. I hope someday I will mean as much to my grandchildren. These memories of Mist will always be dear to me.

-- Sandra Fuller

Sandra Fuller teaches high school at Chaputnquak High School in Chefornak. She has taught in the Bush for six years, and has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Oregon. This is the second time her writings have been selected for this journal. She writes, "I enjoy writing short stories and poetry."

Just Like Home

Greek John's gone.
His fortress fry grill
wrecked, replaced
by fast gas, neon lights.

Wandering folks from
all forty-nine contiguous states
wheel through this familiar
big city plot right there where
John's gone.

Feeling, I suppose,
like they've seen some piece
of a small American town.
Folks are friendly here,
Thank you, ma'am.
And isn't it just like home?

Those polished oakwood walls,
counter tops bruised with dust and age
now lying lost in the county landfill
no longer reflect
me and my buddies
sucking down our cherry/lime Cokes
ducking to sneak a smoke,
while Greek John,
his white aproned shape,
jabbering on the dark side of the
fountain grill,
filled our greasy orders out.

Crowded in those steamy booths
carving initials of
our loves,
our hopes,
and dreams.
Blasting our way through top twenty
chart busters,
strutting our stuff.

Or cruising loudly into
our place.
To rest after a long night's carouse,
filtering past the dusty shelves.
We'd browse
for a Zippo, or Dutch Master,
or skin magazine.
Trying to find some action,
seeking the answers that
Greek John guarded
like gold,
or treasured backroom tales.
He sold us our age,
no more.

John's bus stop shop's
been genericized
into that same neon glitter
we see on TV.
And wandering folks
from all forty-nine contiguous states
wheel through this familiar
big city plot,
right here where,

Greek John's gone.
The past never perfect removed
by bulldozer blades.
The merry dim spot diminished,
but fast here resting still where
no dust filtered sunlight pierces.
His empty shelves, bereaved,
Greek John's gone.

-- Patrick A. Stevens

Pat Stevens has lived and taught language arts in Sitka for the past fifteen years. His poetry has been published in Shaping the Landscape *in three prior issues.*

Outhouse with Unique Charm

It doesn't take long to cross the Kuskokwim River. I start off early in the day to visit Jackie and Gib. The river ice is smooth as long as I stay on Gib's snow machine trail. Gib comes across the river at least once a week to check the mail and buy fresh milk or butter, but more importantly to check on village business, since he is the mayor of Aniak. It is easy to guess why Gib was elected. His whole manner is friendly.

"Hello there, Ruth. Haven't seen you in some time. When are you going to come over and see us?"

"How's your trail across the river?"

"Fine, just fine, or I wouldn't be on this side," he answers with his ready grin, splitting his whiskers.

"Are you going to be home this weekend?"

"Sure. Always home on weekends. Come ahead."

My skis glide smoothly over the new snow. I ski around the island, then up the river along the far bank for about thirty minutes. Finally, I come to what in the summer is Gib and Jackie's boat landing. Now there is a steep ramp where Gib runs his snow machine straight up the hill to the cabin.

I take off my skis and practically crawl to get up the slippery ramp.

"Hello. Come in. Come in. Jackie, put on a fresh pot of coffee!"

Even in the winter Jackie has flowers blooming inside the cabin. She has a magic touch when it comes to growing things.

"Do you want to see the rabbits?" Jackie asks, eager to brave the cold to show off her babies. Each rabbit is named and has a pedigree hanging on its pen door. Jackie raises the rabbits for their prize-winning pelts. Gib helps build cages, haul food, and skin the rabbits when the time comes.

"What happened to this one's ear?" I ask.

"She got it wet and that cold spell we had got it. It froze and just fell off."

"Oh, poor baby."

"But she's such a good mother, I'm glad she lived."

Jackie is busy picking up, examining, and talking to one rabbit after another, changing water where needed, and adding fresh food and vitamins.

"Come, look at this pelt. It is a perfect opal. And this one is a nice deep chocolate."

"I'd love to have mittens made from that one."

We go in and the coffee is done and deliciously warm after the nippy ten-degree air.

As always, after three cups of coffee, I need to borrow the bathroom before finding my way back across the river.

"Just follow the path out back." Gib grins.

"An outhouse?" I ask incredulously.

"Of course." Jackie laughs.

Outhouse, privy, necessary house, john, outdoor toilet--whatever you call it, it usually assaults the mind with unpleasant associations. Besides the usually overpowering odor, there's also the gloom. Shadows that the eyes avoid inspecting too closely lest they come face to face with such grisly creatures as eight-legged predators. Of course, every ordinary outhouse has its resident spider-of-necessity for controlling the flies. Where would that spider be this time of year?

Besides the ordinary expectations, I certainly don't relish such a trip at the chilling temperature of ten degrees.

"You've got to be kidding. Not this little snow bunny," I reply with a determined shake of my head.

"It's not so bad," Jackie says with a twinkle.

Chuckling, Gib says, "If you feel frostbite coming on, just rub vigorously and move faster!"

"Thanks a lot!" I say with real misgivings. But there is nothing else to do. I make my way down the path toward the small plank building fifty feet from the back door of the cabin. "At least the path is picturesque," I tell myself as I walk between walls of white with tops melted and refrozen into ethereal statuary.

Once I reach the door, I plan to lift the latch and finish as quickly as possible. But as the door swings open, my expectations of an odious outhouse change forever.

My eyes are first drawn to a pink-padded seat adorning the hole. The matching pink paper roll hangs from

a fancy brass holder; none of those scratchy one-ply sorts, or, heaven forbid, the legendary year-old catalog or pile of corn cobs ready for recycling. Rather than wrinkling, my nose detects a faint powdery-pink essence. A single picture bedecks the wall: former President Reagan. I wonder at the significance of the political figure. When I ask Jackie later, she replies simply, "What do you think?"

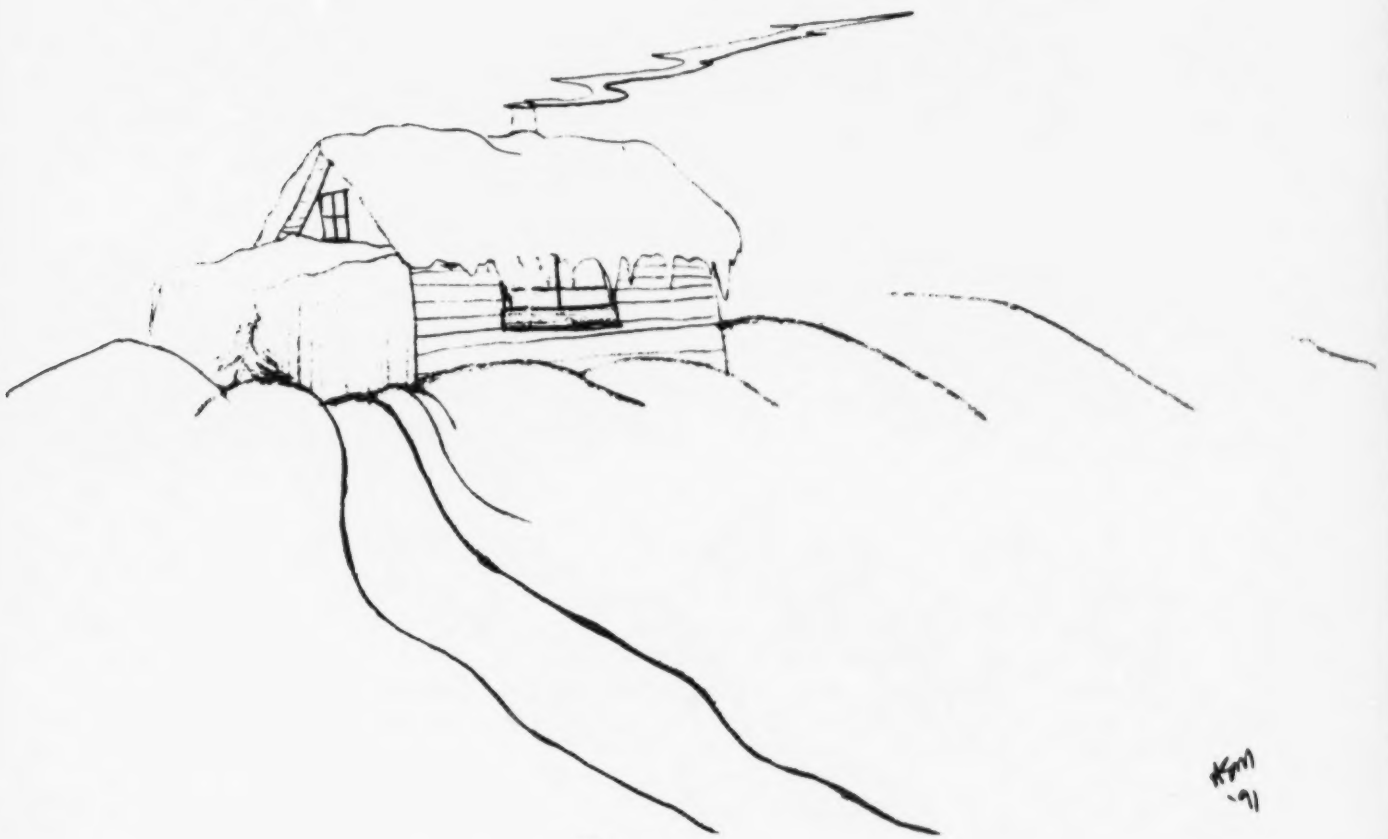
It is amazingly warm! The space-age electric heater and a red heat lamp in the ceiling indicate that Jackie and Gib enjoy their comfort despite choosing to live in a remote cabin without the amenities of town.

My eye is drawn to the crowning touch of this privy beyond compare--a delicately crafted stained glass window! It is set in the south wall so it captures every ray of Alaska's tangent sun beams in its tiny leaded panes of amethyst, azurite, carnelian, and corundum.

At this moment the stigma of the outhouse is broken forever! I discover a new facet of Alaska's unique charm.

-- Ruth Bradford

Ruth Bradford has taught school for twenty-eight years in Oregon, New Mexico, and Alaska. She and her husband taught for one year in a one-room school in the village of Akutan in the Aleutians and another year in a three-room school in Elim, and she has taught special education for the past four years in Aniak. She specializes in learning disabilities and gifted and talented. Odyssey of the Mind has taken up much of her spare time, she writes. Ruth is this year sponsoring the elementary newspaper and enjoys writing newspaper articles and publishing photos of students taken and developed by her husband, Larry Bradford. The outhouse described in this story is a real place on the Kuskokwim River, although she has fictionalized some of the details of the story.



The Great Wheel

It's evening and
I've trekked to Willow mine again
to rummage through amber-stained pages
of ancient newspapers and
turn the crank of a musty old Model A truck and
climb a rusty mound of tailings
heaped up a half century ago
by men hungry for gold
and the toil to find it.

I'm perched here now on top of this placer hill
of cracked rock and strewn stone
where I've found
a narrow
pillow
of soft grass
and black earth
fertilized over the years
by hawks and owls
come to tear at bloody morsels
and gorge themselves after the hunt then
burp up pellets of bone and fur
that melted in deep time
to grow this grass so green and lush
that I could rest on it and ponder
the great weather wheel above
rotating round and round
from east to west
against the clock,
a circle of storm shadow scudding wide
and bold
across a rose-pink cosmos....

while
on the low distant gyro rim
the sun orb
radiates long fans of sky motes
through dusky bellies of high nimbus,
and westers slowly
down,

creeping from cloud to cloud
toward the far black ribbon of Yukon River,
casting on this side
reflections from tabletop mountains of
crimson bearberry leaves and
burnt avens and heathers,
and diminutive bent willows yellowing
over blueberries plump for plucking
(soon to stain purple
fingers and tongues
ready again for the savory spices of autumn).

Below me
chickadees whisper and chirp,
fattening for the winter ahead.
A sharp-shinned hawk chases a thrush into the
birches and
misses.

Overhead
gaggles of young birds cluck
their playful cacophony as they
beeline toward the wide twists and turns
of the great river beyond,
practicing formation, not yet ready for their
long sail south.

From the mountain shadow
two ravens dive and chase,
pirouetting up and around,
bell croaking high in the wheeling sky
(winking now with the first stars of early night)
as rocketing winds dash and ricochet
off ragged slopes of broken talus and
careen against masts of willows and alders,
sending strong messages of
seasons changing.

I reach up and touch my beard
blowing out gray and tangled in careless
gusts and flurries,
thinking of my own wheel,
merging more and more with the great wheel
around me,
as the stars pulse stronger now,
impetuous day winds die to evening breezes
and night birds urge me back
down to camp.

--Frank Keim

Changes2

The community hall was already crowded when Fordham climbed the steps on Saturday night. Teenage boys, Mathew, Harry, Hermes and Ambrose hung out on the portal smoking cigarettes. Their first impulse was to hide the smokes, but they remembered they were on neutral ground and their teacher would ignore them.

"Hey, you got snuff," Ambrose said, smiling good naturedly. Ambrose was powerfully built, a menace to his peers. But he had respect for elders.

"No snuff tonight, Ambrose."

"Well, Hermes wants snuff."

"Gross! I do not, Ambrose," Hermes said defensively.

"It's cold out here. Why are you boys standing outside?" The boys wore only sweatshirts and jackets in the sub-zero temperatures. "There are pretty girls inside just waiting to dance with you."

"Aw, we don't dance old-people dances," Mathew explained.

"But you like the music or you wouldn't come. I'm going to see what that band is doing."

The door swung open to a low-ceilinged room with people ringing the outside, seated on painted wooden benches. Smiling black eyes and approving nods greeted the new teacher. A wiry man with the brim turned up on his cap sauntered across the room. He offered his hand and smiled. "I'm Chris. Welcome. We are happy to see our teachers here."

"You probably already know my name, but it's Robert Fordham. It's good to meet you."

"Welcome to our village." He shook Fordham's hand and walked back to his place on the bench.

There was no stage, but the band sat on folding chairs in back of their battered amplifiers. The bass guitarist tested the knobs on his instrument and the lead guitarist tuned up while the fiddle player practiced a few licks. An elderly fellow sat with his guitar on the side, watching the fingers of the lead man. After a two-note introduction, the bass player twanged out, "You just stomped on my heart...."

Two couples two-stepped on the floor as Fordham searched for a seat along the wall. He spotted one beside an elderly gentleman wearing a brimmed "Skidoo" cap. The man responded with a friendly smile, but he stood and bid a lady down the bench to dance. Other couples volunteered, filling the floor with people who stepped and swayed while in deep tones the bass player sang in a Nashville drawl, "You just flattened my aorta...."

The band paused for the floor to clear. "Snowball!" the bass player announced, "in honor of John Aparaqchuk and his wife, Emily, married thirty-four years today." Mr. and Mrs. Aparaqchuk held hands walking to the center of the floor, where they waltzed when the fiddle sang.

"Snowball!" the bass player called. The couple parted and each chose another partner and waltzed with them. "Snowball," repeated the bass player, and slowly, the floor filled. "Snowball!" A portly lady in a green gingham kuspuk or parka cover left her last partner and searched the line-up for another. Fordham fidgeted. She grinned and extended her hand. Fordham shed his coat and rose slowly, saying, "It's been a long time."

The woman smiled shyly and Fordham placed his right hand on her hip, held up her right hand with his left and took a couple of steps. It was like rowing a skiff in heavy seas. As long as you moved with the swell it went smoothly and there was no trouble. But Fordham rowed with only one paddle, collided hips and stepped on her feet. The woman just smiled.

The fiddle repeated the song, faded, and the couples separated, Fordham thanking his partner profusely. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a crowd of teenage boys huddled at the door, pointing and snickering, and he knew he was in a for a round of teasing Monday morning.

Back on the bench, the Skidoo-capped man seated himself, saying, "I Bennie Tonchuk. First time I see you here." He grinned. "First time you work in Alaska?"

"No. I've worked in the Aleutians."

"Me, too."

"Where?"

"Dutch Harbor with crab."

"I've been there. Which company?"

"Pan Alaska. I king crab butcher."

"Mine was Wakefields at Captain's Bay. I did that job too. Big claws!" Fordham made pincers of his hands

and spread them out as wide as a king crab.

"Big claws." Bennie laughed.

"I remember working there three whole months and the sun came out only one day," said Fordham.

"Me, too. And Elbow Room take my money."

"Yes, I remember that bar. You work like the devil and spend like the devil. Remember the bell? It rings and some crab fisherman, who just got rich, buys the whole bar a drink."

"Me, too. I ring bell."

"Too many hours worked in that place, but the eagles were beautiful."

"That right. Eagles beautiful," Bennie echoed.

"So...this winter you are staying away from Dutch Harbor and Elbow Room."

"Yah, I build sled."

"Dog sled?"

"Yah, dog sled."

"A big project."

"Yah, big project. I get birch wood off beach in summer."

"And now you saw them."

"Saw them, steam them, bend them, and put together."

"How did your people do all that before they had all these tools?"

"They just look for curved woods and shape little bit."

"Broom dance!" the band announced. Couples migrated to the floor. Bennie grabbed his former partner as the fiddle sang "The Westphalia Waltz." With a twinkle in his eye, a stocky old man with short-cropped hair danced with a broom, but suddenly he smacked it to the floor with his foot and cut in on a couple. With much laughing, every other couple scrambled to find a different partner, leaving one man out. The only remaining partner was the broom. The broom smacked and the great partner switch repeated.

Fordham observed the scene from a distance. Toddlers squirmed in grandmas' laps, grandpa danced with his twelve-year-old granddaughter and adults laughed and played like children together on the dance floor. The "folk" at a folk dance took on real meaning. The effortless camaraderie, the practiced ease with which the elders touched everyone with their beaming black eyes, or glided with them across the floor, whispered that these people had been together a long time. And that they belonged here in this village, on this land forever. It was all timeless...genes handed down for shining black hair, smooth tan skin, stocky bodies, full cheeks, oriental eye folds, and skills passed on by tradition for roles as fishermen, hunters, sled makers, ivory carvers, skin sewers, musicians or leaders. Life was a continuation of what had always been. Elders had known everyone from childhood and every birth and death and every day was shared.

"Too much here to ponder," Fordham concluded, and lesson plans for Monday were still uncompleted. He skirted along the sidelines for the door, where the portal was crowded with people having smokes or getting air.

"You're leaving so soon? Glad you could come," Mathew offered.

Another man, eyes heavy-lidded and reeking of liquor, stepped in front of Fordham. "You leave too soon!"

"Yes, I need to get some work done, but I did enjoy the dance."

"You work tomorrow. Dance tonight! You go home too soon," the man challenged.

"I'm sorry, but this is the time I have to go." Fordham imagined a fight scene, knowing no one would win.

"Hey, Bumboy," Ambrose interceded. "You got snuff?"

The man reeled around and Fordham pushed on down the steps. "Goodnight to you all."

The snow crunched crisp and clean under his footsteps and Orion stalked just on the horizon, Betelguese outshining Rigel. The seeping cold was somehow comforting to Fordham as he considered the impropriety he had committed and the drunk man had called him on. He brushed aside the incident. There was work to do at the school.

--Dennis Lenssen

Dennis Lenssen teaches for the Lower Yukon School District and has taught in Alaska for seven years. His work has been published in Breadloaf School of English publications and previous editions of this journal. He is now working on short stories about Native Americans.

Logging Museum

Rusted relics
stand idle

Straining, belching giants
now silent

Helpers of the harvest

Fallers

Buckers

Sawers

Skidders

Yarders

Mighty laborers
of the forest

Partners of the loggers

Obsolete reminders
of rugged days

When timber was plenty
and a day's work
deserved a day's pay

A tribute to Northwest history,
this logging exhibit.

--Sandra Fuller

Famine

Last night I dreamed that you
Would be born a skeleton: fragile
White bones--NOT BIG ENOUGH said
The nurse with her tape measure.
Frowning and prodding. POSSIBLE
GROWTH RETARDATION. And what
Have I got to give you, except
My own inadequate flesh?: YOU
NEED TO GAIN MORE WEIGHT, said
the tape measure. I can't give you
security or lots and lots of money
or healthy habits or self esteem
or anything more than a fighting
chance of happiness in old age.
And who am I to take you away
From whatever nice place you might
Have lived before and then leave you
Alone on a crowded and staggering earth?
We are both fragile bones.

--Evelyn Willburn

Evelyn Jervey Willburn is currently teaching junior high in Coffman Cove. This is her fourth year as a teacher. She teaches all subjects to thirteen seventh- and eighth-grade students. Evelyn began writing poetry 12 years ago, and has been published in "Shaping the Landscape" *and* "The Painted Bride" *quarterly.*

Heaven

(to Stan Marsden on the death of his son)

If you were to ask me: "What is really up there?"
"What has become of my black-haired boy?"
Then I would have no words: only a picture.
A dream-image, of brightness and warmth.
Or maybe I would say that Heaven
Is really not that far from where we stand;
And that if we stretch and look
We might see the shadows of angels.

But if I could say only one thing to you,
It would be this: don't keep him here
Fettered by the things of this world,
(The carved stone and the polished wood).
Instead take his ashes to a corner of the sea
Where the wind blows hard and clean
And let him go. Let him fly.

--Evelyn Willburn

The Juneau Portfolio Process: A New Paradigm

At a recent national conference on Alternative Assessment, Lauren Resnick, in describing the intent behind President Bush's national goals panel, spoke about a series of conversations that should occur about education, asking the question, "What do you want for our kids?"

Though her frame of reference was the national scene and the scope was all of education, that phrase struck a chord with those of us in Juneau who have, in the last few years, had a series of interesting, intense, frustrating, humorous, and enlightening conversations about first grade kids.

In pairs, in small groups, at the building level and the grade level, sometimes even talking out loud to ourselves, we've worked through a different evaluation system that we feel better reflects not only what is developmentally and culturally appropriate, but what is actually occurring in our classrooms.

Like many of our early childhood colleagues nationwide, teachers in Juneau were dissatisfied with the traditional testing routine for primary children. Standardized tests given in the fall were agonizing activities for most children and yielded very little useful information to teachers. For many teachers there was not a good match between what they were teaching (using the district curriculum) and what was being tested. Tests were given only because the district mandated it.

Not only were teachers frustrated by standardized tests, but they were dissatisfied with the conventional first grade report cards. Teachers began meeting to discuss their frustrations, and these discussions grew into a district-wide project to transform language arts assessment in the primary grades. Beginning in September 1990, all first grade teachers in the Juneau School District used portfolios to document and assess their students' development in language arts. This year we extended the project to the second grade; we plan to add another grade level each year as our district fully embraces portfolio assessment. Using portfolios, Juneau's teachers can convincingly show what young children are achieving. We have created a system that can serve accountability beyond the classroom and the district to the state level.

In the handbook Juneau teachers prepared, they begin by describing the basis of the district's language arts policy: "This portfolio represents the work of a child who is working in an integrated whole language classroom as outlined by the City and Borough of Juneau School District's Language Arts Curriculum. In designing this portfolio, developmentally appropriate practices as defined by many well-known researchers and advocates for the education of young children were considered."

It continues: "When we think about the art of communication, we must include reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The four processes require initiation of thought and communication of ideas. Communication, then, is always filtered through the individual's own background and experience, and is very personal." Juneau School District employees believe language is the essential key to academic success in all curriculum areas.

A Portfolio for the Primary Grades

As part of their work together, the first grade teachers developed and refined a set of guidelines for using and compiling students' portfolios. Children's work for their language arts portfolios is stored in durable, bright yellow folders with pockets to hold reading and writing entries. Teachers can also clip quarterly narratives, children's letters, parents' comments or other documentation to the front, back, and on both sides of each pocket. Each child is introduced to the purpose and use of the portfolio in the beginning of the year. It's a place for teachers and students to tell the story of a child's growth over a year's time.

Specifically, each portfolio must contain the following items:

1. Self reflection letter: Each spring, the student writes or dictates a letter about how she feels about herself as a reader and writer.

2. Reading samples (one per quarter): This section includes photocopies of passages (chosen by student or teacher) read aloud by the student, along with a running record showing diagnostic information about the student's comprehension. These passages may come from free-reading choices or from instructional

reading. These samples also include the Reading Continuum (developed by the teachers) and quarterly written narratives of a student's development as a reader.

3. Reading attitude survey (twice each year, before parent conferences): Each student is interviewed by volunteers and instructional aides.

4. Writing samples (one per quarter): This section includes final drafts and works-in-progress, selected either by the student or the teacher. They can be journal entries, original stories, retold stories, non-fiction pieces, poems, and notes written to others. In the first and fourth quarters, a district writing sample is included. During individual writing conferences, teachers fill out a Writing Record Sheet once each quarter. Teachers also keep a narrative of each student's development as a writer, which is later attached to a Writing Continuum form at the end of the year.

5. Speaking/listening skills inventory (fall and spring).

In addition, teachers are encouraged, but not required, to include:

6. Anecdotal observations

7. Oral language cassette tapes

8. Developmental spelling lists

9. Reading logs

10. Drawings and illustrations, especially those that accompany reading samples.

A First Grade Teacher's Perspective

Restructuring to performance-based assessment is a process fraught with stops and starts, involving refocusing and refining the way students are evaluated. Throughout my twenty-year teaching career, I have used standardized tests, anecdotal notes, quick checks, and video and audio taping--all of which, until recently, culminated in the common report card. Typically, during a twenty-minute parent conference, I would talk with parents about their child's performance, go over the checks and letters of the report card, invite them to ask questions and share concerns, and say good-bye until the next conference. Samples of a child's work were either given to the parent or filed in a classroom folder until the end of the year. The report card was the central focus; samples of a student's work were seldom passed on to the next teacher.

In contrast, portfolio assessment lends itself to analyzing each student's strengths and weaknesses in depth. For me, portfolios are the link between curriculum and student performance, providing a personal and purposeful collection of student work. They give a live assessment of the child's skills and performance, and they allow us to examine what evaluation technique will best foster learning for that child.

I think a portfolio, because it is about the child, should belong to the child. At the start of the year I spend some time talking with my first graders about their portfolios. In simple terms I describe their function and importance to them as young readers and writers. We discuss dating and filing their work, from which both they and I will select samples for the portfolios.

Several times a week writing samples are dated, collected, and filed by students in personal folders they keep. These might include writing on specific topics, journal entries, or books. During an informal writing conference, each child and I review the folder and decide what to put into the portfolio. As the year progresses, the work added to the portfolio allows teachers and students to quickly see the progress from writing random letters to developmental spelling and then conventional spelling by the end of the year. During conferences, parents are still given a folder of their child's work, but samples in the portfolio remain there to be passed on to the child's

next teacher.

Twice a year I give my students a writing test that we teachers have generated. It is holistically scored by a district-wide team of primary teachers. It really is exciting to see the children's growth over the year!

We have learned important lessons about how to begin this portfolio process. Successful implementation requires the support, collaboration, and involvement of administration staff, teachers, parents, and students. We especially suggest on-going communication and consistency across the district, and forms designed with the student and parent in mind (unencumbered with educational jargon). Equally important, from a busy teacher's viewpoint, is adequate time built into the school day or week to work on portfolio assessment by ourselves and in grade level meetings. We strongly advocate easy computer access and portfolio computer programs to help with record keeping, the development of a uniform portfolio-scoring system, management strategies to help make the process easier for teachers, and flexible scheduling of parent conferences.

For me, the portfolio process continues to be a challenging innovation. Time is the biggest factor--time to evaluate, to meet with children, to compile the portfolios, and to discuss the information they contain.

Making the transition from report cards to portfolio evaluation involved rethinking and restructuring how I assess students. I realize, however, that this paradigm shift gives the ownership of school performance to whom it belongs: the student. Authentic assessment makes sense to me!

A Reading Specialist's Perspective

In the role of reading specialist, I am a liaison between the day-to-day world of the classrooms and the district level needs of the administration. Taking the concerns of the teachers as they tried to make portfolios part of the classrooms, the Juneau reading specialists met to create procedures that could be implemented successfully by teachers with a wide range of beliefs about teaching and assessing language arts, and yet also provide a meaningful product for all audiences: the child, the parents, current and future teachers.

Over the last several years our role as reading specialists has changed. A few years ago, we administered extensive batteries of individual reading tests and worked with small pull-out groups of remedial reading students. We are now more active partners in classrooms, who base our judgements on observations and anecdotal notes and who contribute our insights to the teachers' narratives attached to the Reading and Writing Continuum forms.

We know many strategies and materials that we can provide to assist our students. And, just as our children are at many levels in their learning, so are we as professionals. In-service training, reading current literature, attending conferences, and talking with each other all contribute to our growth.

Much of the portfolio process includes long-standing practices of many teachers. The parts that involve new or different ways of thinking carry all the baggage that any process of change requires. We have all taken a degree of ownership in portfolios. Our next step in Juneau will be to encourage students and their parents to take greater roles in directing their learning by teaching them about the process.

The Curriculum Director's Perspective

As the district office administrator in charge of managing the process of the first grade language arts portfolio, I have had to confront the district-wide issues that arise in the planning and implementation of such a major instructional change.

Because we worked across the district, we needed to come up with some standardization of the process and the forms teachers would use. This notion of portfolio assessment is a bit different than the highly individualized process described by some, including Donald Graves at the 1991 spring IRA conference. We needed to design and implement one system that reflected and met the needs of assessment and accountability.

One of the most difficult aspects, and one that is at the heart of it all, was working with teachers to change their understanding of the concept *assessment*. Assessment, teachers believed, required its own separate times and methods, and would usually interfere with instruction. In our new understanding, instruction and assessment usually occur at the same time; teachers constantly observe, describe, and evaluate students' work, even when no formal documentation is done.

A reading conference is a good example of a moment when a teacher both instructs and assesses. When first grade teacher Suzie Cary sits down to listen to a child read a book he has chosen, she can make a running record to learn how well he is reading the text. She notices that he reads without regard to exclamation points, for example. Suzie turns to the other children at the table to see who might know about that symbol, and together they have a mini-lesson on what the mark means and how it changes the way you read. The children then go to the book nook to find favorite books and see where there are exclamation points. They read aloud to each other with enthusiastic inflection as they come across their newly learned symbols. The situation has provided documentation through the running record and Suzie's brief notes about the conversation, and at the same time there's been a lesson for a small group of young readers.

Teachers used to worry that anecdotal observations and record keeping took time away from teaching; now teachers see children learning to read and write, and teachers know how to describe that growth formally and confidently. This continues to require lots of hard thinking about what is really happening to a classroom.

Another difficult aspect of the process was the inevitable enemy of productive people--time. It took all of us a whole lot of time this year to talk, to figure out how to do notes and anecdotes, to fill in the forms we had devised for reporting to parents, and to revise those forms. At one meeting in spring, the fact of just having to write the children's names on the top of each form threw several teachers into wails and laments.

As the administrator, I have learned more about the intense and frenetic life of the classroom, teachers' tolerance for change, and how flexible we could be about portfolios while at the same time retaining the integrity of a district-wide system. There were many risks for me along the way: of being highly unpopular when it got stressful, of getting blamed for the whole thing, and of focusing too much on one project in the midst of many other projects for which I was responsible.

Over and over, I had to reply to the question: "Now tell me, why are we doing this?" But as I made up the answers to that question all year long, I came to a new understanding every step of the way. The slogan for the Juneau Board of Education appears on a card displayed in front of every board member at meetings. It says: "Is it good for our kids?" As I struggled with the portfolio process, with the first and now second grade teachers and five reading specialists, and with the answers to questions about our intent, that phrase came to be a bedrock reply for me--it *is* good for our kids.

--Mary Tonkovich, Suzie Cary and Annie Calkins

Mary Tonkovich of Juneau "has rambled through the adventures of language and literacy as a junior high language arts teacher, a speech-language pathologist, a reading specialist, and now a librarian in an elementary school. I've always had a strong love and interest in reading and writing--two of my favorite hobbies."

Suzie Cary has been an Alaska educator for twenty years. Married with three children, she currently teaches first grade for the Juneau School District. Suzie takes an active role in many school and community committees. In her "spare time," she enjoys writing short stories and poetry and hopes one day to write children's books.

Annie Calkins is director of Curriculum and Evaluation in the Juneau School District. After almost nine years at the Department of Education as the language arts specialist, she's enjoying being a bit closer to life in the classroom. The Language Arts Portfolio project is one of several alternative assessment efforts that Annie is coordinating in Juneau.

Kodiak Winter Rains

In the middle of this strange winter,
the shortest day of the year close by,
the rising and setting sun is only rumored
through degrees of gray. Everything here
is darkened by wet, and it is only rarely
that there is no sound of rain.

The bears of summer
are not hibernating. They climb
the slopes and valleys, search for
roots, occasional soggy old berries, the discarded guts
of deer hunters have killed. The deep prints of their
paws fill with muddy water
the ground cannot hold. They sniff the humid air
and think cold thoughts of sleep
that will not come.

--David Jaynes

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